

our children are getting the very best education possible, which is full-time, in-person instruction. They are intent on jamming through this partisan \$1.9 trillion COVID package, which does include billions of dollars for schools.

Incidentally, in working together, we have passed five bipartisan COVID relief packages. Yes, it is harder to work in a bipartisan fashion, but that is why we were sent back here to Washington—to work together. Yet President Biden and the Democrats are saying: We are going to do this one alone. It is going to be their way or the high-way.

The sad reality is, the more the American people hear what is in this \$1.9 trillion package, the more they are not going to like it. Most of the money in this package is not to be spent now. In fact, 95 percent of it will be spent over the next 7 years, after the crisis. We should not use this COVID crisis as a liberal wish list of items here wherein 95 percent of it gets spent in the out-years. How does this help our students and our schools now? The answer is, it doesn't.

This is not how we solve the problems that our students are facing. Fortunately, there is a pretty simple solution. It is this: Listen to the experts. Listen to the science. Reopen our schools, and let's get our students back in the classroom.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, we have had some bizarre weather in my State in the last week or so. We are still reeling from a deadly winter storm that hit all 254 counties in the State of Texas last week.

The snowstorm brought snow, ice, and prolonged subfreezing temperatures. We don't have temperatures below zero in Texas—or at least we haven't for a long, long time, but we did last week. As a result, it paralyzed much of our critical infrastructure, leaving millions without electricity, leaving them without heat, and leaving them without running water for days on end.

The good news is that power has now been restored for the vast majority of Texans, and cities are slowly lifting water boil notices as water filtration systems come back online.

But a number of families are still facing outages, and as we have seen during previous disasters, low-income and minority communities are the hardest hit. Our top priority is to restore power and clean water to every single Texan.

Throughout this episode—this tragedy, really—my staff and I have been in contact with local, State, and, of course, Federal officials to determine what kinds of things we can do to help and how we can mobilize resources as soon as possible. As recovery efforts continue in the coming days and weeks, I will continue to try to do that.

This is not unlike what we have to do periodically for hurricanes that seem to find their way to the State of Texas. But in this case we know that some of the problem was not an act of nature; it was a failure to anticipate these subfreezing, subzero cold temperatures. So we have got to ask not only "What happened?" but "How can we prevent it from happening again in the future?"

As I said, we experience, from time to time, hurricanes, occasionally tornadoes and tropical storms or record-low temperatures, but we cannot allow our infrastructure to go offline for days on end.

I want to thank the countless Texans who supported each other during this crisis. There are those that have gone above and beyond the call of duty in their official capacities, whether it is as first responders, emergency dispatchers, utility and energy workers, healthcare workers—the list goes on and on.

But there are also the unsung heroes—those who invited neighbors into their homes, delivered hot meals to those in need, checked on an elderly neighbor, those who towed vehicles stuck in the snow, and so much more.

I just want to assure all of my constituents that we are in this together, and we will do everything we can not only to find out how this happened but what we can do to make sure it never happens again.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on another matter, as you know, this week our Democratic colleagues in the House are continuing to take action on President Biden's relief bill, using the budget reconciliation process.

It is really not so much an issue in the House, where you can do anything you want, basically, with a majority vote. But if all goes their way, our Democratic colleagues will write a \$1.9 trillion check, funded by taxpayers—future taxpayers because it will be borrowed money—without the input of a single Republican in Congress, either in the House or in the Senate.

We know that there are 10 Republicans who went over to the White House, had a very pleasant meeting with President Biden, but were essentially told: My way or the highway. Any effort to try to come up with a bipartisan compromise was rejected.

Regardless of your political affiliation or views on this particular bill, that fact alone should trouble every single American. After all, there was no need for partisan maneuvering to pass a coronavirus relief bill last year. As a matter of fact, we passed five of them. All of them were signed into law with overwhelming bipartisan support. No bill received fewer than 90 votes here in the Senate. One even passed unanimously.

Of course, the reason for the widespread support wasn't because Members thought these relief packages were perfect. There were things I would have changed if I had had a chance, and I am

sure others would have made other changes.

But each bill was a clear response to the crisis at hand and free from any unrelated partisan priorities. In other words, it was focused on COVID-19 relief.

Suffice it to say that the same cannot be said about this latest piece of legislation, this \$1.9 trillion bill being rammed through Congress by our Democratic colleagues.

Overall, I have three concerns with this legislation. First, it would dramatically overspend in areas that aren't even in need of additional funding.

In the early days of the pandemic, we had no real expectation about how long the crisis would last or how big a blow it would deal to our economy. After the CARES Act was signed into law in March, late March, it made sense to hit the pause button so we could see how what we did was working—what was working well and what was not working so well. Where was more assistance needed? Where was it sufficient?

These needs became obvious pretty quickly. One example was the Paycheck Protection Program. Within 2 weeks of passage of \$350 billion worth of relief, it ran dry—in 2 weeks. So we quickly came together on a bipartisan basis to replenish the fund with additional money, and we did so again at the end of the year.

This sort of bipartisan, step-by-step approach is the most effective way to get funding where it is needed without wasting money on already well-funded programs.

But, unfortunately, our friends across the aisle didn't apply that same logic to this \$1.9 trillion piece of legislation, which sends hundreds of billions of dollars to areas that are nowhere near running out of money.

One example is public education. So far, Congress has provided more than \$110 billion to support K-12 education, including \$68 billion in the relief bill passed just in December. Schools in Texas have used this money to update their ventilation systems, purchase masks and personal protective equipment, and make other investments in classroom safety. But the vast majority of the funding that was provided in December is still waiting to be used. In other words, there is no current need for any more money from Congress.

As a matter of fact, as of February 9, States have spent just under \$5 billion of the \$68 billion we have already provided for K-12 education. They have spent just \$5 billion out of the \$68 billion.

As a reminder, in December, the CDC—the Centers for Disease Control—estimated schools would need only about \$22 billion to reopen safely, meaning there is already more than enough money to support safe school reopenings. But that data-driven estimate from the experts doesn't seem to matter to our Democratic colleagues or the administration, who are preparing

to drop another \$130 billion for public education. So \$5 billion has been spent out of the \$68 billion we have already appropriated, and our Democratic colleagues now want to spend another \$130 billion.

Since most of the existing funds remain to be spent, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that the bulk of spending of this new proposed funding would occur after this year, after 2021; that is, the majority of the funding in this new so-called COVID relief bill wouldn't even be touched until, God willing, the pandemic is already in the rearview mirror.

I have advocated for funding to help our schools prepare for a safe return to the classroom, and the experts tell us that there is more than sufficient funding already out there to make that happen. So I am left to conclude, as I think most—really, any reasonable person would, that it is irresponsible to have taxpayers foot the bill for another \$130 billion when there is no need for the funding.

And this isn't like we are spending money that we have. We are actually borrowing money from future generations, exacerbating an already huge Federal debt.

That brings me to the second concern I have with this bill: It completely ignores the trajectory of our economic recovery.

At the start of the pandemic, we all know the economic hammer came down hard and fast. As States imposed lockdown measures, businesses closed their doors, people lost their jobs, and consumer spending plummeted.

But as the pandemic has gone on, even the more moderate predictions about an economic depression have proven wrong. By any measure, our economy has recovered faster than any of us expected. That should be a positive thing. We should be happy about that.

The unemployment rate has steadily declined, going from 14.8 percent in April to 6.3 percent last month. State tax revenues have largely rebounded. As a matter of fact, California has fared so well that it is adding money to their rainy day fund. In other words, they don't need any more money. Their revenues have exceeded their revenues from years before the pandemic even hit.

The Congressional Budget Office projects that the U.S. economy will return to its prepandemic size by the middle of this year, even if Congress doesn't approve another penny of money. Let me say that again. The Congressional Budget Office projects the U.S. economy will return to its prepandemic size in the middle of this year—just a few months away—even if Congress does not approve any more Federal money to aid the recovery.

Well, it is tough to reconcile that fact with the claim from our friends across the aisle that we need to spend another \$1.9 trillion, money that we don't have.

Despite all the data that shows our economy is recovering, rebounding in a robust way, this bill sends another \$350 billion to State and local governments that are not facing the dire budget shortfalls that we worried about last March. And it is not without negative consequences.

Larry Summers, who served as the Treasury Secretary during the Clinton administration and who was an economic adviser to President Obama, offered a good observation on the situation in a recent opinion piece. He wrote:

[W]hereas the Obama stimulus was about half as large as the output shortfall, the proposed Biden stimulus is three times as large as the projected shortfall. Relative to the size of the gap being addressed, it is six times as large.

For this administration to make public comments about following the science—certainly, following the facts, listening to the experts—it is hard to reconcile that with this bill that is so divorced from reality. I don't think you can do it, which brings me to my third big concern with this bill: This is not a COVID-19 relief bill in its entirety. It includes a range of completely unrelated, liberal priorities that should not be included in this emergency spending, let alone one that is rushed through in a partisan manner through the budget process.

One case in point is the proposed increase in the minimum wage to \$15. Regardless of the cost of living, businesses in small towns and major cities alike would be required to pay their employees \$15 an hour by 2025. Now, for big companies in big cities, that may be doable. That may be the going rate to get the kind of quality workforce you want. As we know, companies like Amazon have already implemented their own \$15 an hour minimum wage back in 2018, and they can afford it. But for small businesses that are the backbone of our economy and are key to our economic recovery following this pandemic, this could lead to massive layoffs or permanent closures.

The Congressional Budget Office that I referred to earlier estimates that this provision alone could put 1.4 million Americans out of work. Do we really want to pass a provision that would put 1.4 million Americans out of work? That is 50 percent more than it could potentially lift out of poverty.

As a reminder, our colleagues are trying to rush this massive change through Congress as part of a pandemic relief bill because they know that it is the only shot at passing a bill that would have this sort of dramatic negative effect on jobs—all under the guise of economic relief and stimulus. There is simply no way to justify a one-size-fits-all mandate that treats Silicon Valley the same as it does mom-and-pop businesses in rural America.

And the range of unrelated provisions doesn't stop there. This legislation includes \$30 billion for public transit agencies, a blank check to bail out

mismanaged union pension funds without any reforms, and funding for a bridge to connect the majority leader's home State of New York to Canada. So we are going to build the majority leader a bridge to Canada as part of an emergency COVID-19 relief bill. It is outrageous. Everyone remembers the infamous earmark now known as the bridge to nowhere. At least in this case we know where the bridge will end up. But a pandemic relief bill should not serve as a Trojan horse in order to pursue such parochial and local desires or any other part of an unrelated liberal wish list.

So the Biden bill of \$1.9 trillion actually creates more problems than it solves or it tries to solve nonexistent problems. It drives up our national debt by spending money that experts say is not needed. It ignores the data—the facts about our economic recovery—and it creates even more problems, all in the name of securing a win for the administration and our Democratic colleagues. It is as though this bill were drafted in a vacuum with no attention paid to what has already been done, how things are going, or what we anticipate the need will be in the future.

If the evidence and the experts tell us that more funding is needed to bolster our response to the virus, I will be one of the first people to advocate for additional targeted relief. But this race to spend money for the sake of spending money and ignore what the experts are saying is absolutely disgraceful.

The two parties have done much better than this. As I said, last year, we passed five COVID relief bills on a bipartisan basis because we all were trying to come together and meet a common enemy—the COVID-19 virus and the consequences of the pandemic. But it seems like this \$1.9 trillion wish list is divorced, really, from the COVID-19 relief that we did in the past and is designed purely for partisan political purposes, and I think it is an unfortunate development in an area where we have so successfully worked together in a bipartisan way.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from Minnesota.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES RULES OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 2, of the